Wings over Alaska

WINTER 2004 BIRDING NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 1 • ISSUE 3 ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH & GAME • WATCHABLE WILDLIFE PROGRAM

Inside

A Record Year

Although Juneau birder Matt Brooks didn't begin the year with records in mind, at 5:30 AM on December 15 he joined fellow birder Steve Zimmerman on North Douglas to hear a great horned owl - his 200th species in the Juneau area for 2004.

Read an interview with Matt on page 4.

Waterfowl in Winter

By Robert H. Armstrong and Marge Hermans
(reprinted with permission)

During a cold winter in Southeast Alaska, a bitter wind whips along the beach. Rocks and gravel glisten with ice. Even in sheltered inlets the water is frosted with whitecaps, and its temperature has dropped to a seasonal average of about 42°F.

A few hundred feet offshore 30 or more sea ducks—warm-blooded animals that must maintain a certain body temperature to survive—bob on the waves. Every few moments, as if they were taking turns, individual ducks dive headfirst beneath the surface, popping up moments later like corks shot from some underwater popgun.

Southeast Alaska is a Mecca for sea ducks in winter. All eight species found in North America can be seen here then—buffleheads, harlequin ducks, long-tailed ducks, Barrow's and common goldeneyes, and black, white-winged, and surf scoters. How do these birds survive the cold, especially when they spend so much time submerged in cold water?

Sea ducks have wonderful natural insulation—a kind of avian equivalent to the human population's Polarfleece® parkas and Gore-tex® rain jackets. They have a thick layer of fat just be-

Waterfowl, continued on page 8.

Note from Wings Program Coordinator

Southcoastal birders are finding some interesting species (a Costas hummingbird and a tufted duck in Cordova and a mountain bluebird in Seward), so don't letter winter keep you indoors.

Along with an eruption of pine siskins in Juneau has come an outbreak of salmonellosis. For those who feed birds, you'll find some important safety reminders on page 9 to help keep your avian visitors healthy.

I look forward to sharing your reports on birds and birding from around Alaska in 2005. As always, let me know what you like (and don't) in your newsletter.

Happy New Year!

Karla Hart

wingsoveralaska@fishgame.state.ak.us

Wings Over Alaska is a Watchable Wildlife program of the Division of Wildlife Conservation, Alaska Department of Fish and Game.

Alaska Airlines is a sponsor of *Wings Over Alaska.*

From the Field

The 32nd (consecutive) Kodiak Christmas Bird Count was held Saturday, December 18. Six Main Upland Groups (MUGs) were supplemented by 4 Micro Area Groups (MAGs), 2 Ptarmigan SWAT (PSWAT) teams, 2 Boat Utility Groups (BUGs), and 12 Urban Feeder Detail Areas (UFDAs). All together, about 40 people participated in the field, and about 24 were at 12 feeders.

Keith Lockhart came all the way from Texas, and in doing so, became the all-time long distance CBC Homo sapiens migrant, beating out Peter Chen, who came up from California many years ago. Two people, Judy Dearborn and Ed Clark, traveled to Kodiak from Fairbanks. Everyone else was from Zip Code 99615. The Pingree family in Uganik Bay held an unofficial CBC in their yard and found seven species, including a fox sparrow and an American tree sparrow, the first they had ever seen.

The weather for the count was excellent. High overcast, no wind or precipitation, and temperatures in the low 40's.

The species found that are "rare" or rarer on the Kodiak checklist in winter were red-throated loon, yellow-billed loon, red-faced cormorant, great blue heron, Canada goose, cackling goose, Eurasian wigeon, northern shoveler, ring-necked duck, merlin, ruby-crowned kinglet, American robin, fox sparrow, golden-crowned sparrow, and red crossbill (needs to be upgraded to "uncommon" on the checklist). Also of interest were: all four loons that occur in our area; four ring-necked ducks, rock ptarmigans by both Ptarmigan SWAT teams (nothing wrong with a little redundancy!); a record 19 american robins; a record 13 American tree sparrows and the only count gray-crowned rosy-finches at one Bell's Flats feeder; a red fox sparrow (a readily distinguishable race of fox sparrow that may soon be pronounced a species separate from our brown ("sooty fox sparrow") at a town feeder; lots and lots of common redpolls.

While the total number of birds has not yet been tabulated, the number of species seen, 78, is anticipated to once again be the highest in the state.

Rich MacIntosh

Christmas Bird Count results are posted at http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/

*97 ravens at Prudhoe Bay
*18 species for King Salmon
*50 species from Mitkof Island

Birds & Windows

More than 13 pine siskins died when they hit the glass on a sky walk between two buildings in Juneau in mid-December. While habitat loss is the greatest global conservation threat, glass kills more birds than all other human related factors - combined. In 2005, International Migratory Bird Day examines the obstacles birds may encounter in flight (windows, towers, wind turbines, cars, lights, wires) and explores the many ways we may minimize their impacts.

There are some simple steps that you can take to minimize danger to birds at your windows. Visit http://www.flap.org for more information.

Great Backyard Bird Count

February 18 - 21, 2005

New York City & Ithaca, NY, November 2004—During the weekend of February 18 through 21, people across the North American continent are encouraged to count the birds in their backyards and report them over the Internet, as part of the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), one of the world's largest volunteer efforts of its kind. In addition to its value as a research study, the GBBC allows people of all ages and backgrounds to celebrate birds and provide vital information about North America's birds.

"We call it the Great Backyard Bird Count to make the point that anyone can participate," says John Fitzpatrick, director of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. "But really, a 'backyard' can be anywhere you happen to be, a schoolyard, a local park, the balcony of a high rise apartment, a wildlife refuge. No matter where you go in this 'Great Backyard,' you're almost certain to find birds in all their beauty. By participating in the Great Backyard Bird Count, you can help researchers better understand bird population numbers and distribution across the continent."

"Taking part in the Great Backyard Bird Count takes as little or as much time as participants wish," says Audubon's director of citizen science Paul Green. "The important thing is to just take part, count for the birds, and enjoy North America's Great Backyard."

"In addition to counting the birds in your own backyard, this remarkable event gives you the opportunity to visit some of our most special places and wild lands," says Bob Perciasepe, Audubon's chief operating officer. "In this way, the Great Backyard Bird Count reminds us that North America's birds consider the whole continent to be one great big backyard; and in a sense, it is our backyard as well."

Instructions for participating can be found at www.birdsource.org/gbbc. There's no fee or registration. Libraries, businesses, nature clubs, Scout troops, and other community organizations interested in promoting the GBBC or getting involved can contact the Cornell Lab of Ornithology at 800/ 843-2473 (outside the U.S., call 607/254-2473), 159 Sapsucker Woods Road, Ithaca, New York 14850, or the National Audubon Society at citizenscience@audubon.org or (215) 355-9588, Ext 16, Audubon Science Office, 545 Almshouse Road, Ivyland, PA 18974.

In 2004, checklists were submitted from 34 Alaska communities. Birders in Kodiak located 63 species, Gustavus birders identified 52. In Kobuk, they identified 5 species, and in Yakutat 4. You can bird as a team or an individual, for a few minutes or days. We'll report some highlights in the spring newsletter. wingsoveralaska@fishgame.state.ak.us .

Hunting up Hooters

By Craig Medred

Anchorage Daily News
(reprinted with permission)


US Fish and Wildlife Service

On cold, clear nights in the timbered foothills of the Chugach Mountains, listen close and you can hear owls looking for love. Though the dead of winter might seem a strange time for birds to be preoccupied with mating, the great horned owls, the largest of their breed, have already begun.

"Hoo-hoo, hoooooo, hoo-hoo," they cry out into the long dark.

Along the mountains, the calls resonate and roll on. Given the right conditions, some scientists have concluded, these sounds can travel for miles on a still night, defining a territory and seeking a breeding companion.

"We're getting close to the time they might be doing their nesting," said local birding guide and owl fanatic Bob Dittrick.

Continued on page 5, Owls.

Digital photography is a great tool for capturing details for study and consultation on challenging identifications and to document rare birds.

Nome birder Austin Ahmasuk took this picture of what he and others decided is a juvenile red knot last summer. His lack of 100% confidence in the identification led us to discuss whether I should label photos with species or leave it to readers to study the pictures and identify them themselves.

What do you think? Readers range from novices to experts.

Have you photographed a bird in Alaska that still has you stumped? Or might stump others? Send it in and I'll select one or two to share with readers.

Your bird or birding photo submissions, tips, news and stories are always welcome. With your permission, we'll share them as there is space. Since we work in a digital environment, with your help, guidance and contributions we can grow this newsletter.

Wings Over Alaska Interviews Juneau Birder Matt Brooks

Q. Did you start out the year with a particular goal to see 200 species or as many as possible?

A. I actually had no intention of trying for the 200 species mark until late summer, when I added up my species for the year and realized I was already over 175 and had a shot at it. I had heard about another birder's year previously, and thought it would be fun to at least try for the record. To get the last species, I had to focus on specific birds, intentionally seeking them out.

This kind of birding isn't quite as relaxing as simply going out and seeing what I can find, but it is an interesting way to challenge (or frustrate) myself.

Q. How often did you bird?

A. I bird pretty much all the time, though definitely less in the winter. My wife and I are active hikers, which gets us out a lot. My summer work at the Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center allows me plenty of time to bird in a good spot, and even "on the clock!"

Q. How long did you have to wait/work between your 199th and 200th bird?

A. My 199th and 200th birds came only a week or so apart. Last week I went out the road on a clear, cold night and played a barred owl call every mile or so until I got a response. Number 200 was a great horned owl: a species that had eluded me in Juneau thus far. People knew I was looking for it, though, so when Steve Zimmerman heard one near his place on North Douglas, he gave me a call. Though it was 5:30 in the morning, I rushed over. It stopped calling right before I got there, and it took almost an hour before we heard it. I'm really glad that Steve was there for #200, since I was so close to that goal with so little time left. It makes it more "official" to have a witness (and to share in the excitement of finally doing it).

Q. Have others achieved the 200 species/year in Juneau level?

Paul Suchanek definitely has done 200 species in one year here in Juneau, but I don't know of any others. I know that several people have close to 240 species (maybe more) for their Juneau life list. I'm approaching 210 now. My Alaska list is almost at 250.

Q. Highlights?

A. Definitely the Common Nighthawk that I got to watch from 30 feet away through my scope as it roosted on the boardwalk out at Point Bridget State Park [40 miles north of town].

Q. How long have you been birding? And, my favorite, how did you get started in birding?

A. I've been birding for about 4 years now. I was given a bird book and binoculars [separate, uncoordinated gifts] as graduation-from-college presents. Little did my family know what they were getting into. The week after graduation from New Mexico State University, I drove out to Cave Creek in the Chiricahua Mountains of Arizona. I'd heard that there were good birds there, so I went to check it out. I followed a pack of birders up the trail as they searched for elegant trogons, but they were set on that bird and I was happy with anything. Long story short, they moved on down the trail in search of trogons and I held back, enjoying the solitude more. After they were gone, a male trogon called and flew to a nearby branch, where I got to watch it all by myself for almost 20 minutes! I was hooked.

Owls, continued from page 3.


Tim McCabe, US Fish and Wildlife Service

The 58-year-old birder has had a fascination with these bug-eyed birds of prey since he was a kid back in New Jersey in the 1960s. He was intrigued not only by their haunting calls, but by their night-time hunting skills as well.

"I got interested in birds and birds of prey, and owls just came along with that," he said.

Dittrick brought his interest north with him and expanded it in the 1980s when he began putting owl-nesting boxes all over Southcentral Alaska. He now monitors about 100 of them.

They are interesting not just because they attract owls to nest but because, in the process, they become owl feeding stations. Once eggs hatch, Dittrick said, the parent owls take on distinct roles in the rearing process.

The males hunt. The females stay in the boxes to rip prey into edible size portions for their chicks. This lifestyle makes it easy to investigate what the owls are killing and eating.

"We've seen about everything in there," Dittrick said, "even a few boxes specializing in bats. One had about six bats in the box."

Dittrick still wonders how an owl was able to swoop out of the sky and grab bats, which are famous for their fine-tuned hearing. That would seem to give them the ability to detect the sound of air across the wings of an owl swooping in for the kill and evade attack.

But apparently, at least for some bats, it doesn't work too well.

Bats, however, are not a staple of most owls. That burden falls on the back of the red-backed vole, although Dittrick noted it's not the only victim of owls.

LURING OWLS FOR OBSERVATION

The predatory birds of the night appear to attack any target of opportunity.

"We've seen just about every bird that lives in the area in the boxes," Dittrick said, and when boreal owls are using the boxes, a fair number of snowshoe hares, too.

The boreal is a smallish owl — only about 8 or 9 inches long — that hoots with a rapid but soft po-po-po-po. It shares habitats with the northern saw-whet owl, an even smaller cousin.

The saw-whet is only 7 to 8 inches tall and weighs but 3 ounces. But it's most easily recognized by the sound it makes, which is more whistle than hoot. This whistle, usually repeated in endless succession, is said to sound like someone sharpening a saw, thus the name.


Rob MacDonald, US Fish and Wildlife, Togiak Refuge

Dittrick said that about 50 percent of the owl nesting boxes he now has set up from north of Wasilla to South Anchorage attract nesting saw-whets. That's a significant change from 20 years ago.

"When we started doing it," he said, "our purpose was to see our first boreal owl."

The boxes lured them in. And, Dittrick said, "it was all boreal owls for several years."

Then saw-whets started showing up, including a pair that used a box along the Knik River Road, "which was the most northern record for saw-whets on the continent," Dittrick said.

No more. Over the years, Dittrick has discovered saw-whets nesting ever farther north. Now, he said, even his northernmost boxes in the Susitna Valley attract saw-whets.

SPECIES COMPETE FOR HABITAT

Meanwhile, these owls appear to have taken over a significant chunk of what at first appeared to be boreal owl habitat in Southcentral Alaska.

"Now we're over 50 percent saw-whets," Dittrick said. He has no good guess as to why, noting that not only do saw-whets and boreal owls appear to feed on the same prey, they also seem to swap nesting sites.

"We've had saw-whets in the same box (as borealis)," he said. "Not at the same time, but in the same box."

About the only certainty about box use, he said, is that it depends on prey availability.

Both boreal and saw-whet owls

seek boxes near high-density vole populations. The infrared vision of owls enables them to assess this by detecting the amount of vole urine in the snow, Dittrick said.

"They figure out that prey number pretty quick," he said. "In a low prey year, they won't even nest. I think they still pair up," but just forgo breeding.

And in a good year, well, Dittrick has observed some high nesting success and interesting owl behavior.

EVIDENCE OF ODD BEHAVIOR

One year, for instance, he found the front half of a snowshoe hare in one nest box, home to a boreal female. And he found what appeared to be the matching rear half of the hare in a box used by a different female.

"I was thinking I had a polygamous male," Dittrick said. He never could confirm that there was one male, boreal owl out there catching hares and then ripping them in half to support two families, but he says such behavior would make a certain amount of biological sense.

"It's a good strategy for taking advantage of the prey base," he said. "And when there's lots of prey around, they get going early and they get going good."

While Dittrick has only suspicions about male owls practicing polygamy, he said there's strong evidence the females practice polyandry.

As the chicks grow, he said, nests tend to get foul with decaying meat, and the females are no longer needed to rip prey into smaller chunks. Chicks can do that themselves.

Some females, finding themselves in a stinking nest with a bunch of overgrown young, decide to leave, Dittrick said. Some also end up pairing with other males, and starting a second family.


Bob Miles, US Fish and Wildlife Service

This is possible, in part, because of owls' long breeding season. Boreal and saw-whet owls will join the great horned owls in pairing up and mating long before there is even a hint to winter's end.

Dittrick said he has found borealss pairing up to mate as early as Valentines Day.

"The saw-whets," he added, "probably start a little earlier because they're migratory."

And then there are those great horned owls, the biggest and most powerful of the lot with wingspans up to 5 feet wide and the ability to flash silently out of the sky to end the life of an unsuspecting hare or magpie or mouse or just about any other small critter not paying attention.

Hungry great horned owls have been known to go after the occasional dog or cat, and back in February of 1992, one developed something of an attraction for Anchorage nordic skiers.

That owl swooped down to nail a number of Hillside skiers. Three ended up at the hospital. Several others had the down almost scared out of their ski vests.

Fortunately, the big owls are usually friendly, and this time of year they're preoccupied with breeding.

Great horned owls are the ones you can hear calling on quiet nights now, the males hoo-hoo, hoooooo, hoo-oooing away. Females answer with a higher pitched krrooo-oo.

THE EARLY NESTERS

Scientists add, however, that these are not the only sounds the great horned owls make. When disturbed, these owls have been known to let go with what has been described as a "whaaa whaaaaaa-a-a-aarrk." There are also descriptions of catlike meows, barks, shrieks, coos and beak snapping.

If you want to see owls, Dittrick said the big horned owls are usually the easiest to track back to the sound. These owls favor old goshawk nests in the Anchorage area and will usually be calling from or near such a nest.

Goshawk nests are hard to miss. They measure about 3 feet across and 1 to 2 feet deep. Female owls will often be sitting on eggs in those nests by March, well before most other birds even begin returning to Alaska.

The eggs hatch in 28 to 35 days, and the young will be crawling around the edges of the nest by the time they are 5 to 6 weeks old. But they do not fly well until at least 10 weeks of age, and will often remain with their parents for up to five months.

Evolutionary biologists theorize the early breeding season and the long period under parental care are linked directly to the skills the young owls must learn if they are to hunt successfully as adults.

And if they do not hunt successfully, they die.


US Fish and Wildlife Service, St. Paul Island

Planning for Spring?

Below are some highlights from the special event calendar at http://www.wildlife.alaska.gov/viewing/calendar.cfm

- Join our neighbors in the Yukon **April 16-24 for the Celebration of Swans.** View tundra and trumpeter swans and other waterfowl. http://www.environmentyukon.gov.yk.ca/viewing/shcos.shtml

- Kodiak hosts the **Whalefest: A Migration Celebration, April 15-24** at the same time. Although events focus on the migrations of whales, a keynote event is BirdBrainDance, a "navigational dance project" highlighting gray whales and birds. Kodiak also offers tremendous coastal birding. http://www.whalefestkodiak.org/

- The shorebirds are returning! **May 5-8 plan to head for Cordova's 16th annual Copper River Shorebird Festival or Homer's 13th annual Kachemak Bay Shorebird Festival.** Both offer a wealth of birds, events, and hospitality and are great places to bird even outside of festival time. www.cordovachamber.com and www.homeralaska.org/shorebird.htm

- **International Migratory Bird Day community events around May 14.** The 2005 theme is *Clear the Way - Reducing Bird Deaths from Collisions.* Volunteer to help organize a local event, talk at a school, or simply attend and support bird conservation. Register and find local events, get ideas and information at http://www.birdday.org

In addition to these events, we encourage you to be adventuresome and create your own spring birding trips. Yakutat, the Stikine River, Hyder, Dillingham (join the Fish and Wildlife staff and locals for a migratory bird count on May 14), Adak, Nome, St. Paul, Gambell, the Tetlin Refuge, and Bethel are just some of the possibilities.

USGS National Wildlife Health Center

Feeders that are not kept clean or areas where feed can mix with bird fecal material are potential sites for salmonellosis to occur.

IF YOU FEED BIRDS

Precautions against Disease

People who feed birds cannot ignore the potential for spreading disease. Eight relatively easy steps can be taken to prevent or minimize disease problems at feeders.

1. Give birds space
2. Clean up wastes
3. Make feeders safe
4. Keep feeders clean
5. Use clean healthy food
6. Prevent contamination
7. Act early - Don't wait to act until you see sick or dead birds. With good prevention you'll seldom find sick or dead birds at your feeders.
8. Spread the word

Just because bird feeding is not problem-free does not mean that it is bad or should be stopped. It does mean you have an ethical obligation not to jeopardize wild birds. What is called for is intelligent bird feeding. Follow the precautions listed above, and you can continue to enjoy feeding healthy wild birds.

You'll find the details at http://www.nwhc.usgs.gov/whats_new/fact_sheet/

Waterfowl, continued from page 1.

neath the skin that helps keep them warm. Outside their skin is a thick layer of down—short, fluffy feathers that help conserve body heat by trapping pockets of air. Covering that is an outer layer of contour feathers that pack closely together and have interlocking barbs, so the birds are virtually waterproofed—another characteristic that conserves heat.

Spreading oil that they take from a gland at the base of the tail may help birds waterproof the outer feathers, but this has not been proven. Spreading oil on the feathers while preening may be more important to protect the feathers against fungi, bacteria, and lice that would damage them.

Some sea ducks have down as much as two-thirds of an inch thick in places. It is usually thickest on their underside, the part of the body most exposed to water and thus likely to lose heat the fastest. Birds in northern areas like Southeast have more fat and feathers than birds of the same or similar species living father south, so they are better equipped to deal with cold temperatures. In extremely cold weather sea ducks also shake their feathers after a dive, throwing off drops of water that could otherwise quickly freeze.

What keeps the ducks in Southeast during cold weather is the ready supply of food. Sea ducks eat small crabs, clams, shrimp, limpets, chitons, mussels, amphipods, barnacles, sea urchins, sea stars, marine worms, small fish, and algae—all foods that are available in winter as well as in summer.

Although most **trumpeter swans** nest to the north and winter to the south, a few trumpeters winter in Southeast, where they add an elegant snowy white presence to gray winter days. Peter Walsh, a dedicated birder in Petersburg, for many years reported that an average 100 swans a year wintered in Blind Slough near Petersburg. A small flock sometimes numbering up to 30 swans has also wintered over at Snettisham, south of Juneau, for at least the past 12 years.

During very cold weather the swans sit down on land with their feet and legs tucked beneath their thickly feathered bellies, and their heads tucked back under their wings. This posture is one way birds can reduce heat loss from parts of their bodies that have the least insulation—their unfeathered legs and feet, and their heads, especially around their eyes.

Tim McCabe, US Fish and Wildlife Service

eBird

Powered by Birdscape
a joint project between the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Audubon

© ADF&G

Is there a favorite place you like to watch birds on a regular basis? Your backyard, a lunchtime walk route, or neighborhood park or refuge? Consider adopting it as an eBird site survey location.

Observations regularly submitted from a single location help scientists more accurately address broad-scale questions about the ebb and flow of bird populations across the years. Participation is free. Cornell Lab of Ornithology has created three simple protocols; you select which works best for you. As always, you can access and analyze all of your eBird data online.

www.eBird.org

Waterfowl, continued from page 8.

Swans' ability to feed at night is an advantage in winter because it allows them to be active and generating body heat during the coldest hours, while they can rest during daylight hours, when it is likely to be warmest.

Southeast Alaska's **Vancouver Canada geese** are year-round residents, not to be confused with smaller, paler subspecies that migrate through many wetland areas in the spring. According to Jim King, a wildlife biologist who lives near the Mendenhall Wetlands in Juneau, 500 to 600 Vancouver Canada geese spend the winter on the wetlands, and they seem to have adapted their habits to fit the human calendar. King says that although the birds vacate the wetlands during hunting season, by mid-October they often come in to feed at night when the hunters are elsewhere.

Soon after hunting ends in mid-December, the geese return to the wetlands, and they stay there day and night until early April, when the paired adults move to their nesting sites at such areas as Seymour Canal on Admiralty Island.

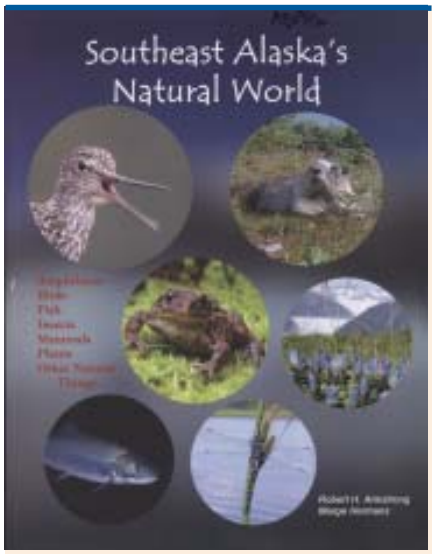
Geese, ducks, and swans all share a fascinating winter adaptation that helps them overcome the problem of heat loss and possible freezing in their bare, unfeathered legs and feet. Ducks swimming in 34-degree water, or geese standing on a frozen lake, could lose a great deal of heat through their extremities. But they don't.

© Austin Ahmasuk, Common Eiders

The arteries and veins in their legs lie next to each other, and this minimizes heat loss. When chilled blood from the feet moves through the veins toward the body, it picks up heat from the adjacent arteries, which carry blood that is warmer because it is coming from the bird's body core. At the same time, as warmed blood from the bird's body core moves through the arteries toward the feet, it is cooled by the nearby veins, and there is less warmth to be lost where the foot or leg is exposed to cold air, water, or ice. Under extremely cold conditions, the birds can further reduce heat loss by constricting the blood vessels in their feet and reducing the amount of blood flow.

Because of this natural heat exchange, a duck standing on a frozen lake may have a body core temperature of 104°F but a foot temperature only slightly above freezing. Considering that bare feet and legs lose heat about four times as fast when they are immersed in water as when they are exposed to air, the importance of this amazing feature is pretty clear, especially for swimming and wading birds.

Winter in Southeast Alaska is not an easy time, yet sea ducks, swans, and geese have adapted to weathering the winter in remarkable ways. We can only marvel at how they survive raging storms, ice, and cold while we sit cozy and warm in our heated homes.



Southeast Alaska's Natural World

Songbirds to shorebirds, dippers to drummers, herons to hummingbirds, and eagles to ptarmigan. Bob Armstrong (author of *Birds of Alaska*) and Marge Hermans combine their photography, naturalist and writing talents to share rich personal observations and some of the latest research findings on plants, fish, mammals, insects and amphibians in 40 engaging stories that are interesting to read, even if you don't live in Southeast Alaska.

How do owls pinpoint where sounds come from?

What do sandpipers find on mudflats?

Why do dippers dip?

How many spruce seeds may a crossbill eat in one day?

Christmas Bird Counts

Christmas Bird Counts began on Christmas Day 1900 as an alternative to the "side hunt," a Christmas day activity in which teams competed to see who could shoot the most birds and small mammals. Instead, scientist Frank Chapman proposed to identify, count, and record all the birds teams saw, founding what is now considered to be the most significant citizen-based conservation effort and a more than century-old institution.

Today, over 55,000 volunteers count and record every individual bird and bird species seen in a specified area. The 105th CBC is December 14 - January 5. You can look at results, see if there is a count near you and get more information at

http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/

The *Wings Over Alaska Birding Newsletter* is available online at http://www.birding.alaska.gov .

To receive an e-mail when new issues are posted (quarterly), send your e-mail with SUBSCRIBE in the subject line to wingsoveralaska@fishgame.state.ak.us

Winter Programs for Birders

Across Alaska bird clubs host regular meetings from fall through spring to share information and comaraderie, plan bird counts, and other events. All of the meetings listed below are free and open to non-members. Whether new to town or to birding, you can connect, and find ways to get involved as well. Volunteer opportunities abound, from the Christmas bird count to field trips, newsletters, web pages, and board membership.

Watch your local media and bulletin boards for other bird-related events. Many public land and resource agencies, universities and non-profits sponsor lectures, slide shows and workshops at little or no cost throughout the year. Are you a birder outside of Alaska? Share your Alaska stories and slides with others and encourage them to follow the birds north in the spring.

Anchorage Audubon Society

7:30pm 3rd Thursdays at Campbell Creek Science Center
Enter the Campbell Tract at the intersection of Abbott Loop Road and 68th Ave. Proceed through the gate on the left of the parking lot. Watch out for dog teams, moose, and bear!
www.anchorageaudubon.org

Arctic Audubon Society (Fairbanks)

7pm 2nd Mondays, usually at Noel Wien Library. Meeting locations may vary, watch for public notices. www.arcticaudubon.org

Juneau Audubon Society

7:30pm 2nd Thursdays at Egan Auditorium on the UAS Campus . Talks will be given by notable experts in their fields, with topics covering natural history, outdoor photography, adventure travel, and birding around the globe. www.juneau-audubon-society.org

Mat-Su Birders (Palmer)

2nd Wednesdays at Palmer Public Library They schedule speakers for most meetings. For more information contact Bob Winckler at winckler@mtaonline.net

Alaska Bird Observatory (Fairbanks)

Check their calendar of events at www.alaskabird.org. Throughout the year they offer a variety of free and low cost lectures and workshops, including activities for children.

Kodiak, Prince William Sound (Cordova), and Y-K Delta (Bethel) Audubon Societies

These clubs are active with field trips, Christmas Bird Counts, and meetings. Watch local media and bulletin boards for information.